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VOC FOR IOP/FN  
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FRED BROWN/NEW DELHI

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INDIA: TARAPUR ATOMIC FUEL ISSUE

ANNCR:

THE U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION LAST WEEK HELD UP A SEVEN POINT SIX TON SHIPMENT OF ENRICHED URANIUM FUEL FOR INDIA'S TARAPUR ATOMIC POWER PLANT. THE COMMISSION'S ACTION, WHICH LEFT THE FINAL DECISION UP TO PRESIDENT CARTER, TOUCHED OFF A STORM OF ANGRY REACTION IN INDIA. PRIME MINISTER MORARJI DESAI WARNED THAT AN ADVERSE DECISION WOULD LEAVE INDIA FREE TO ADOPT WHATEVER MEASURES ARE NEEDED TO SAFEGUARD ITS INTEREST. FROM NEW DELHI, V.O.A. CORRESPONDENT FRED BROWN HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

THE MEMBERS OF THE U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION WHO VOTED AGAINST THE FUEL FOR TARAPUR SAID THEY DID SO BECAUSE INDIA HAD INDICATED IT WILL NOT AGREE TO FULL-SCOPE NUCLEAR SAFEGUARDS FOR ITS NUCLEAR FACILITIES AS LONG AS OTHER COUNTRIES DO NOT ALSO OPEN THEIR FACILITIES TO INSPECTION. INDIANS SAY THAT IT IS DISCRIMINATORY TO INSIST THAT INDIA, WHICH HAS FORESWORN ALL NUCLEAR TESTING, TO AGREE TO THIS REQUIREMENT WHEN OTHERS THAT ARE TESTING AND WHICH POSSESS LARGE ARSENALS OF NUCLEAR ARMS DO NOT.

ONE OF THE ASPECTS THAT MOST UPSET INDIANS ABOUT THE ACTION OF THE REGULATORY COMMISSION WAS THAT THE COMMISSION SEEMS TO BE APPLYING A DOUBLE STANDARD. EARLIER THIS MONTH, THE SAME COMMISSION APPROVED LICENSES FOR THE EXPORT OF ENRICHED URANIUM TO THREE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES--FRANCE, WEST GERMANY, AND DENMARK--THE DAY BEFORE A BAN ON SUCH SHIPMENTS CAME INTO EFFECT.

INDIANS ALSO POINT OUT THAT THE ATOMIC POWER PLANT AT TARAPUR WAS BUILT UNDER AN INDO-AMERICAN AGREEMENT SIGNED IN NINETEEN SIXTY-THREE WHICH COMMITTED THE U.S. TO FURNISH FUEL FOR TARAPUR UNTIL NINETEEN NINETY-FOUR. INDIA AGREED NOT TO BUY FUEL ELSEWHERE DURING THIS TIME.

INDIANS SAY A U.S. DOMESTIC LAW CANNOT TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER AN INTERNATIONAL CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATION. IT WAS IN LINE WITH THIS ARGUMENT THAT PRIME MINISTER DESAI ON MONDAY ARGUED THAT IF THE U.S. FAILED TO HONOR THE AGREEMENT, INDIA WILL BE LEFT FREE TO ADOPT ANY MEASURES NEEDED TO PROTECT ITS INTEREST. MISTER DESAI ALSO SAID PRESENT STOCKS OF FUEL FOR TARAPUR WILL BE SUFFICIENT TO KEEP THE PLANT GOING UNTIL ABOUT NINETEEN EIGHTY OR A LITTLE BEYOND. HE SAID THIS SHOULD ALLOW ENOUGH TIME TO EVOLVE ALTERNATIVE METHODS TO KEEP THE PLANT GOING.

MISTER DESAI DID NOT DISCUSS THESE ALTERNATIVES, BUT ONE IS KNOWN TO INVOLVE SUBSTITUTING LOCALLY PRODUCED FUEL. ONE SUCH MIXTURE IS ALREADY UNDER DEVELOPMENT AT THE BHABHA ATOMIC RESEARCH CENTER NEAR BOMBAY. THE DIFFICULTY IS THAT ONCE THE NEW FUEL IS READY, MAJOR DESIGN MODIFICATIONS WILL BE NEEDED AT TARAPUR TO ACCOMMODATE IT.

AN OTHER POSSIBILITY IS TO USE THE NUCLEAR REPROCESSING PLANT BUILT BY INDIA NEAR TARAPUR. THE PLANT WAS ORIGINALLY INTENDED TO REPROCESS THE SPENT FUEL FROM TARAPUR. BUT BECAUSE PLUTONIUM THAT COULD BE USED FOR MAKING NUCLEAR WEAPONS IS ALSO A BY-PRODUCT, THE U.S. HAS REFUSED TO ALLOW THE TARAPUR FUEL TO BE TREATED AT THE FACILITY.

SOME INDIANS ARE NOW SAYING THAT IF THE U.S. BREAKS ITS CONTRACT TO SUPPLY TARAPUR WITH FUEL, THIS WILL LEAVE INDIA FREE

TO REPROCESS THE WASTE FUEL. MISTER DESAI SEEMED TO BE HINTING AT THIS POSSIBILITY IN HIS STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT MONDAY. HOWEVER, HE MADE CLEAR THAT HE STILL HOPES TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE THROUGH DIPLOMACY.

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JS/RTD